Press release

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Met Office innovation enables children to read weather in Braille

24 April 2002

Blind and partially sighted children now have access to innovative Braille weather charts thanks to the Met Office. This is a big step towards developing more specialist meteorological learning material for blind and partially sighted children.

For some time, the Met Office has provided schoolteachers with weather-related education resources to help teach children about meteorology, which forms part of today's school curriculum. An eight-page pack has recently been developed, containing three maps, information sheets and activities - all in Braille.

The Met Office worked with St Vincent's School for Blind and Partially Sighted Children in Liverpool to produce the Braille packs and a specialist reprographics department at St Vincent's, experienced in producing learning material for the classroom, is producing the packs on site.

Jacquie Syvret, education development manager at the Met Office, explained, "As a result of a personal enquiry from one of our weather forecasters, we began to realise that we weren't doing enough to provide educational material for special needs children. The Braille charts are a fantastic resource for the classrooms of blind and partially sighted children, to help get meteorology onto their curriculum."

Pupils at St Vincent's School for Blind and Partially Sighted Children using the Braille weather packs

Ian Byron, deputy head teacher of St Vincent's School said: "We jumped at the chance to work with the Met Office on this extremely worthwhile project. Anything that assists in the teaching of blind and partially sighted children has our full support. We are looking forward to using the materials in our own classroom activities and to helping other blind and partially sighted children benefit from them too."

The Braille materials are produced using a special type of paper that is heat sensitive. When marked in black and run through a photocopier, the paper will rise to depict images that can be recognised by the children as charts, diagrams or symbols. Any text is produced in Braille, using a computer, or in modified large print for partially sighted children. The packs are designed in black and white so that partially sighted children can see them as clearly as possible and so that teachers can photocopy them for the whole class.

The Met Office recognises that innovation is a key element in future success and awarded its education department with a prize for the development of the Braille packs in its internal Innovation Awards. Staff voted the Braille packs as a winner, showing their support for this new development in education for blind children.

The Innovation Awards ceremony was held in March 2002. Prizes were presented by Colin Prescott, who, later this year, with co-pilot Andy Elson, will attempt to take a balloon to the edge of space, 25 miles above the Earth.

More about learning from the Met Office

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